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ABSTRACT

The sociologist R. Bierstedt locates power in three sources: numbers of people, social organization, and available resources within the group. Women who are family day care providers can be empowered when they operate within a network of providers; when they are affiliated with a professional sponsoring organization; and when they deploy personal, professional, familial, and social resources. Providers must understand the reasons for networking and the advantages of professional affiliation. These ideas are relatively easy to grasp; more difficult is understanding multiple roles, in which are invested not only personal and professional expectations but also familial and societal assumptions and demands. Through the aegis of the professional organization, family day care providers should expand beyond local horizons and develop statewide and nationwide associations in order to have an impact on legislative and administrative regulations affecting child care in general and family day care in particular. The New Jersey Family Day Care Organization is one such group developed to influence legislation and meet additional needs of family day care providers. (RH)

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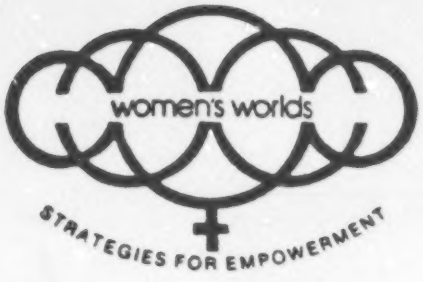

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WOMEN AND.....CHILD CARE: MAKING DECISIONS TO GET THINGS DONE

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Women and...Child Care:
Making Decisions to Get Things Done

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to adequate nutrition and medical care.
to free education.
to full opportunity for play and recreation.
to a name and nationality.
to special care, if handicapped.
to be among the first to receive relief in times of disaster.
to learn to be a useful member of society and to develop individual abilities.
to be brought up in a spirit of peace and universal brotherhood.
to enjoy these rights, regardless of race, color, sex, religion, national, or social origin.

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WOMEN AND...CHILD CARE:

Making Decisions to Get Things Done

Edna Runnels Ranck

Bierstedt (1950) locates power in three sources: numbers of people, social organization, and available resources within the group. Empowering women requires examples of each of the three sources of power; this paper maintains that women who are family day care providers can be empowered when they operate within a network of providers, when they are affiliated with a professional sponsoring organization, and when they deploy personal, professional, familial, and social resources. They must understand the reasons for networking and the advantages of professional affiliation; these are relatively easy to demonstrate. The most difficult of the concepts is understanding their multiple roles in which are invested not only personal and professional expectations, but also familial and societal assumptions and demands. Through the aegis of the professional organization family day care providers should expand beyond local horizons and develop state- and nationwide associations, particularly in order to have impact on legislative and administrative regulations that affect child care in general and family day care in particular. Two of the programs in a private, non-profit organization are described in this paper: a family day care program in one U.S. county, and a state-wide professional organization of family day care sponsors. In many other localities similar programs exist and flourish. Although each program and system varies from one another, like the human beings they reflect, they are more alike than otherwise.

A Family Day Care Program

Family day care is most simply defined as out-of-home, non- residential child day care in the home of the provider (Clarke-Stewart, 1982; Collins & Watson, 1976; Squibb, 1980). A family day care provider has elected to offer in her own home safe, healthy, dependable care for a small group of children, usually no more than five or six at a given time. Most often the children's parents are employed, attending an educational program, or in need of respite care. Standards for family day care homes

are set by states, counties, municipalities, or professional organizations, depending on state law governing child care services (Adams, 1982). Fiscal and program support for professional organizations develops in various ways, and participation in sponsored programs reflects the strictness of the standards and the specificity of implementation and monitoring. The place of family day care on the child care spectrum is perceived differently by various segments of the society, ranging from that of babysitter to that of profession. In this paper family day care is far more than babysitting and is considered part of the early childhood education profession, although this position requires explication of a set of standards and expectations. The paper attempts to make explicit certain assumptions about family day care and to identify its previously unrecognized role in contemporary society.

Assumptions

Although child care is considered within the context of early childhood education it is perceived as a unique institution in its own right. With its varied historical roots (Braun & Edwards, 1972; Joffe, 1977; Roby, 1973) in education, home economics, health, and social work, child care in the late seventies began and now in the eighties is coming into its own with a discrete identity. Its unique qualities derive primarily from the developmental characteristics of very young children, from the duration of care both in terms of hours in a day and of years over time, and from the pluralistic nature of the American culture. The crystalizing

events that have placed it in the political and economic limelight include the rapid and profound changes in family roles and structures, and the less rapid but equally radical changes in women's self-perceptions (Ranck, 1981). Like all children's programs, family day care is not just taking care of children; like the others it is invested with unspoken assumptions and far-reaching expectations. Both the assumptions and the expectations fall into the multiple categories of societal, familial, professional, and personal.

Societal assumptions. Current statistics on the family (Friedman, 1979) strengthens the awareness that changes in the family have transformed large segments of the population: the increased numbers of working women including mothers, the number of two-career families, the number of single parent families, the increase in family mobility, and multiple shifts in sex roles. In place of the traditional family home and hearth there is what might be called "family sprawl." Historically the family represented safety, stability, and predictability, a cohesive, continuous, concentrated place in time to which one returned periodically for refuge, restoration, and refreshment. Families stayed put...in one house in one community; their changes implied growth and increased mutual support. In the present-day family it is almost impossible to define an area that is not only subject to change, but to radical and potentially destructive alteration: parents, married or single, are employed outside the home; families increasingly include step-parents and the vast structure this implies; frequent moves mean that individual families go

from place to place, and that extended families are spread across many cities, states, and nations; men and women, fathers and mothers, experience expanded personal, sexual, and vocational roles, each of which affects both self and other family members. The technology that supports these changes makes travel faster and cheaper, allowing one or both parents to travel daily distances to jobs that previously were occasional family journeys. Other technologies permit easier food acquisition and preparation, and bring vast amounts of information into the home, including much that once was considered inappropriate for children and adolescents. The traditional family was large (it had numbers);had its internal hierarchy and social context (it had social organization); and maintained its strong support system among members (it had available resources). According to Bierstedt's definition the family had power. With the trend toward continuous "family sprawl" power is dispersed and diluted in various ways, most significantly in ways that apply to the children in the family: "we are...in the throes of one of the truly major revolutions in several centuries...shifting the child-care function out of the home." (Bernard, 1972)

The power of the family as cultural microcosm sustains the socialization of the children so that over time they extend the family into the future, and over space they disperse it into the culture to contribute to its continuous development. In order to accomplish this, the demands of the human child have become definitive and stable: to have a safe and a healthy place

8

and a community; to have adequate amounts of nutritious food; to have opportunities to develop emotional and social bonds with family members and friends; to have adult models who offer respect and acceptance; and to have appropriate experiences that permit cognitive and creative development. There is no way to short-cut or deny these components of human socialization without causing some degree of pathology; without an appropriate and adequate environment that provides physical, emotional, social, intellectual and moral enhancement, a child cannot live beyond mere existence. In the face of rapid and pervasive change that alters the conditions under which children's needs are met, a society must develop and provide alternative environments and experiences for its children's well-being. For children of working families, the primary social institution beyond the family is commonly called child care. Despite child care's long American history, there is almost no cultural experience of child care as a broad community need among families of all socioeconomic levels. Current efforts in the child care community strive to meet the ever-growing demand for "the new extended family" (Galinsky & Hooks, 1977); attempt to correct for "family sprawl" by sharing the care of children among parents, family members, friends, and most importantly, relative strangers; and create out-of-home living environments that will provide what children need to thrive. One child care environment is family day care.

Family day care currently supplies over 80% of the daily out-of-home child care in the United States, and is seen by many as the logical answer to the growing need for child care. Its advantages are attractive: a home-like environment for a small group of children of different ages and backgrounds in the care of one constantly available adult; home-cooked food similar to that of the child's family; a relatively flexible unstructured daily schedule; a safe, healthy place in which to learn and grow; a low financial overhead; and freedom from the unattractive aspects, real or imagined, of center-based care. Such attributes must be balance with some potentially negative aspects of family day care: women still at home caring for children, often undervalued and poorly paid; violations of licensing requirements in order to take one or two more children; a lack of educational and experiential background for understanding the care of children who are not one's own; undependable care subject to abrupt termination; and even the possibility of restrictive discipline, denied emotions, and actual abuse or neglect. Studies have shown (National Day Care Home Study (NDCH), 1981) and programs demonstrate ways out of the dilemma so that appropriate family day care is designed to meet the varied needs of the provider, the child, the parents, and the community. The power belonging to individual families can be restructured in order to provide an inclusive environment for children and their families. It is a balancing act of the highest order.

Familial assumptions. In addition to the broad societal needs that can be met by child care in general and family day care in particular, there are familial needs to be considered, especially within the provider's family. Decisions must be made about who in the family will work and where; about which skills exist and are marketable; about child care arrangements; and about implicit and explicit family and ethnic group assumptions and attitudes toward working wives and mothers. In families where the woman elects to care for others' children there is a range of reasons: young children at home; limited job skills and work experience; lack of transportation to get to a job; and adherence to spousal or family beliefs about working wives and mothers. Others consciously decide to provide child care as an outgrowth of their professional commitment to young children; these women would do well in any child care setting and so are not the ones addressed in this paper. For some there are unexpressed, perhaps unconscious, reasons based on low self-esteem, fears associated with a lack of job-seeking and job-holding skills, and reluctance to override objections to work outside the home. Becoming a provider who cares for children at home threatens none of this; she is in a protected and known environment doing something she understands on an elemental level, and able to set her own policies about hours, fees, and vacations. Because child care is often perceived as an automatic skill bestowed on women, it is not seen as real work requiring preparation, on-going training, and constant upgrading. A provider who perpetuates this belief, fails

to change and avoids personal and professional growth. The NDCH study showed that trained and affiliated providers offered higher quality care than those without a professional relationship. Family day care providers, if they are to succeed, must examine the reasons for becoming a provider, and determine the level of vulnerability within the family and in relation to the children in care. Providers who opt for professional affiliation forever alter their position in their family, in the child care profession, and in the community. Like all change, such an affiliation has immediate and long-range consequences for all concerned.

Professional assumptions. The fundamental professional assumptions about family day care place it within the child care field as one option among many; therefore a provider is subject to assessment, monitoring, and evaluation before and during the time that child care is provided. A provider who is expected to meet standards and to participate in preservice and inservice training is by definition performing a professional responsibility and always in need of additional information about child care. A provider performing adequately in the several inherent subject areas in child care does work comparable to that done in child care centers, but with the unique aspect of doing it alone. The subject areas in which the provider must perform and for which she must receive training include nutrition, health, safety, child development, discipline, early education and learning, creative expression, physical and social development, selection of activities for different aged children, and recognition of behavioral

aberrations. The provider must also develop administrative skills relating to parent/provider policies, financial and tax records, legal and insurance responsibilities, community resources, and must deal appropriately with abused and neglected children if necessary. The family day care provider must demonstrate a willingness to conform to reasonable standards, to set up an adequately structured program, to accept restrictions, to initiate new ideas, to take additional training, to work cooperatively with other providers, and to attend and participate in professional meetings. The primary shift is from a perception of child care as personal to that of professional; from a focus on nurturing to one that includes both nurturing and teaching (Dimidjian, 1982). For the capable but inexperienced provider who comes to child care out of personal reasons there must be a structure able to receive the provider and to offer a professional style that accepts existing skills while encouraging new efforts and broadened responses.

The professional organization empowers family day care providers by offering a range of services directed both inward and outward beyond the group. Inwardly the organization sets, presents, explains, and enforces standards, as well as provides technical assistance and information. It is essential that the organization help clarify the various roles played by the family day care provider: the provider is simultaneously an individual, a wife, a mother, and caregiver all within the same setting and during the

same timeframe, all with little direct supervision; the provider must maintain ongoing relationships with several children from different families, and must develop productive relationships with the parents; and the provider must be able to sustain an internal sense of accomplishment regarding her own work (Dimidjian, 1982). The organization empowers the provider by giving specific strategies for coping with various events, and by modeling the roles the provider must also play: teaching, facilitating, counseling, problem-solving, organizational skills and behaviors, skills with which to handle conflict and disagreement and skills to deal with crisis, accident, or attack. Through these services the professional staff demonstrates the value of the provider's work, and approves, corrects, and confirms the provider's role in the lives of young children and also in the family itself. While this process threatens and turns some away from affiliation, it most cases the provider responds by growing in self-esteem and in demonstrating child care skills. As the provider's work improves, standards are maintained, self-restrictions are imposed, realistic policies are set, and ideas are expressed to colleagues and others. For the woman seeking to grow in self-esteem and value, being a family day care provider offers unlimited opportunities; for those not yet free from unrealistic expectations of self and others, it is threatening to have power and to be unable to use it well. Providers respond to empowerment according to basic personal assumptions about self and work.

Personal assumptions. The family day care provider's self-awareness determines the ability to set short-range and long-term goals, to articulate perceptions about caring for children of people whom the provider does not know, and to distinguish between her dual roles of nurturing and teaching. The provider's ability in each attribute is revealed at progressive levels of professionalization: at the time of initial inquiry into the program, at the time of acceptance into the program, and during the time when response to parents and profession indicates a willingness to cooperate and to integrate self among others. Goal-setting orients the provider toward a future in which she will remain in the family day care structure, or in which she will move on within the child care profession, or in which she will move out into other employment. Skills gained in family day care are transferable to other positions within or outside the child care profession. The demands made in developing relationships with children and families serve to expand the capabilities of the provider and to permit further expansion with other families or among other workers in other fields. A clarity of purpose between nurturing and teaching roles enables the provider to define discreet personal and professional skills which are useful in whatever field she chooses to work. An empowered family day care provider knows about her self, her family, and the world of work; and makes decisions based both on personal and professional data that are authentic, realistic, and productive.

The Role of Family Day Care in Contemporary Society

From the current social, familial, professional, and personal assumptions outlined above, comes a clear role for family day care services in contemporary society. As a logical extension of both the families of the provider and of the care children family day care redirects the familial power previously held in individual families and arranges for it to be shared between and among them. Rather than being a further example of "family sprawl" this and other forms of child care should be a redefinition and consolidation of power in such a way that all concerned benefit. It is especially important that this redefinition of power be as logical and efficient as possible so that young children are affected in only positive ways. For this to occur each level of assumptions stated above must reassess its existing preconceptions: society via its various systems must see that parental responsibility for children can be shared, that support for children must come from various sources, and that child care in all its forms must be valued as an investment in time present and future. Specific families must see that work done competently can be accomplished in many places and by all family members; care must be taken to prevent where possible and to consider when necessary any threats deriving from earned income, professional input, and client approval. The professional organization must be least susceptible of all to preconceptions about child care, and be responsible for dispelling them through education, public announcements, and advocacy. Providers must take personal responsibility for

self-development, evaluating the meaning of being a family day care provider and resolving potentially disturbing effects on family organization before they become destructive to the family, to the care children's families, and to the profession itself. The professional organization can assist with the resolution of problems and work toward prevention of personal and family crisis and discord. Because family day care providers are predominantly women, the ongoing process of self-development is linked with the issues concerning women's roles in family and society; success as a family day care provider rests on satisfaction with these roles and empowering women in this and other child care occupations requires a combination of efforts to bring about continued satisfaction, work stability, and overall personal and professional success. To do so requires not only the affiliation between provider and professional organization; an external networking effort is also necessary.

A State-wide Professional Family Day Care Organization

Perceiving family day care as a full option within the child care community raises questions pertaining to program regulations, zoning ordinances, tax reporting, funding requirements, and problems arising from complaints, audits, and legal charges. Where states regulate family day care, such issues are resolved within the context of existing statutes and administrative codes; in the United States this is true in all but five of the fifty states (Adams, 1982). In states where no standards are imposed, and New Jersey is one of the five, these issues tend to emerge and to be resolved at each single event. This tedious process plus other advantages of organization prompted the formation of a state-wide professional

group composed of family day care program sponsors. It has been effective in addressing general issues common to all programs and in presenting a unified position on some legislative and administrative issues. Because there are as yet no state standards for family day care, the organizational focus has been on sponsors rather than on the providers themselves, although in some states it is the provider associations that function as advocates (Bookman, 1976; Bookman & Burke, 1975). The New Jersey Family Day Care Organization (NJFDCO) predicts that with the implementation of state standards provider associations will develop and flourish. Within the past several years the NJFDCO has addressed family day care topics pertaining to training providers, assisting new sponsors, learning about political advocacy, and most important of all, developing legislation that will create state standards for family day care homes. In support of legislation the NJFDCO has performed five essential tasks: 1. maintained internal organization as a voluntary group with frequent changes in membership and leadership; 2. incorporated members representing various child care program styles; 3. trained its membership in advocacy skills; 4. worked with two state legislators on bills for family day care regulations; and 5. developed an external network with state advisory, state agency, and state advocacy groups. The fluidity of the tasks has allowed for steady growth within membership turnover and has adapted to changes in the ongoing process of creating legislation. The experience of democracy in action survives

frustration and disappointment (Eidenberg & Morey, 1969; Redman, 1973; Thomas, 1975); nothing can dull the excitement inherent in the prospect of successful advocacy and productive legislation that will benefit children, families, and child care providers.

Conclusion

New patterns and models of American family life make it necessary to restructure the power in families so that child care, a traditional role for women, can continue to socialize and educate the children within the community. Child care services no longer limited to the individual family must provide an extended environment for children that will slow down the trend toward "family sprawl" in which rapid and profound changes in family life and roles reorient traditional roles and behaviors. Family day care is a particularly attractive option among child care programs; but providers must be especially conscious of their role in sharing the care of children in order to avoid preconceived ideas about the roles of the family, the caregiver, and children. According to Bierstedt's definition of power, it becomes essential to empower family day care providers so that they have access to a network, so that they are affiliated with a professional organization, and so that they have access to appropriate resources including but not limited to fair payment. Child care in general and family day care in particular are now a part of the American culture and must be safeguarded by standards reflecting the power in families; child care standards must derive from families, from the child care professionals, and from

government representatives so that children are protected from inadvertent neglect and are provided with adequate and appropriate people and experiences at all times. Women in child care, starting where they are, must be empowered in order to care for the children, to learn from each other, and to forge new links and build new networks for creating a stronger world.

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